

Navigating global space of tertiary education and ending up in Denmark

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Navigating global space of tertiary education and ending up in Denmark. Educational strategies of mobile students

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the number of students pursuing tertiary education abroad has more than doubled, from 1.9 million in 2000 to 4.3 million in 2012 (OECD 2013). Student mobility is believed to contribute to the development of transnational elites. This is particularly true for international students who attend highly ranked universities in USA, the UK or France. As pointed out by Börjesson (2005), an investment in a degree from one of the top universities in these countries is not only an investment in significant educational capital with global applicability, but also in an institutionalized transnational social capital that stretches across most of the world.

It is less clear whether this is also the case for students who go to what Eskelä (2013: 145) calls “off-beat study destinations”, that is lesser known universities in countries where the main language is not a major languages. We therefore know very little about the hopes and aspirations of students who go to such destinations. Nor do we know if they can count on the same kinds of benefits as can students who go to the more common destinations. Therefore, in this article we explore the aspirations of international students who go to Denmark, a small European country that recently joined the global competition to attract “the best and the brightest” of the internationally mobile students (Mosneaga and Winther 2013: 181), in order to get an idea of who they are and what they hope to achieve. Drawing on a survey of 179 international students attending eight different MA Programs at a Danish university, and on 70 narrative interviews with students who participated in the survey¹, this article aims to pinpoint the strategies of students who navigate the global space of tertiary education and end up in Denmark.

The analysis takes inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of strategy, and explores how a Danish university becomes a possible study destination for different students and for different reasons. After an introduction to Denmark as a destination for international students we outline Bourdieu’s conceptualization of strategy and its methodological implications. After this, we explore different strategies leading international students to Denmark.

¹ The data presented in this article was collected as part of a larger research project on internationalisation of university education in Denmark funded by the Danish Research Council, FKK. We thank FKK for the funding. We also thank the students who generously shared their time and their lives with us.

2. Denmark as a destination for international students

Danish universities have been part of various forms of international cooperation for a long time. But it was not until the 1990s, with the establishment of EU's Erasmus program, that concern with the ability to cater for larger numbers of foreign students spurred considerations. Up through the 1990s, more courses were taught in English, and since the beginning of this century Danish universities have taken a more systematic approach to internationalisation. New international MA-programs have been launched and mergers and expansions have been undertaken to create more competitive universities (Wilken and Tange 2014). At present there are eight state-funded universities in Denmark. There are no private universities.

Danish universities have traditionally been free of charge for all students. In 2006 tuition fees were introduced for non-EU/EEA students. Fees cost between €6,000 and €16,000 annually. A majority of the non-EU/EEA students currently enrolled at Danish universities receive scholarships. A study published in 2012 showed that of the 3.764 international non-EU/EEA students enrolled at Danish universities, only 743 (20%) pay tuition fees (Oxford Research 2012: 17). Besides having free education, Danish students are entitled to a non-repayable state stipend, the SU, which helps to cover living expenses (approximately €750 per month). Additionally, low interest loans are available as well. In 2013 a controversial ruling by the European Court of Justice extended the right to receive the SU to EU/EEA students. To be eligible these students must work next to their studies, as the right to SU is linked to the rights of mobile workers in the EU.

Although the number of incoming students have quadrupled over the past decade, from around 5,000 in 2001 to around 20,000 in 2012 (UFM 2013), only 0.6% of all mobile students go to Denmark (UNESCO 2015). In terms of percentages, this puts Denmark a little above European countries such as Finland (0.5), Norway (0.5) and Portugal (0.5), a little below Sweden (0.8) and way below the major destinations, France (7.7), UK (12.2), and United States (21.1) (ibid).

The majority of the international students in Denmark come from the neighbouring countries Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Germany, followed by students from new EU member states such as Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria. Denmark also receives students from the rest of the world, albeit only in small numbers. As shown in the table below, this makes Denmark stand out compared to the neighbouring countries. While the latter attract the majority of their students from non-European countries, China is the only non-European country among the top 10 countries sending students to Denmark:

Denmark	Norway	Sweden	Germany
Norway (3581)	Sweden (758)	China (2547)	China (19441)
Germany (3245)	China (733)	Iran (1775)	Russia (9480)
Sweden (2506)	Russia (624)	Germany (1616)	Austria (8277)
Romania (2016)	Germany (482)	Finland (1521)	Bulgaria (6186)
Lithuania (1716)	Iran (470)	India (1069)	Poland (5772)
China (1204)	Nepal (400)	Pakistan (1055)	France (5682)
Iceland (1187)	Pakistan (273)	Bangladesh (600)	India (5645)
Bulgaria (1115)	Ethiopia (264)	Greece (587)	Cameroun (5463)
Poland (1094)	India (239)	France (530)	Ukraine (5444)
Latvia (823)	Denmark (212)	Italy (477)	Turkey (5422)

Table 1: Top 10 over incoming students in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Germany (Source: UNESCO 2015)

In this article, we analyse empirical material collected during a long-term fieldwork at one Denmark's larger universities. The fieldwork was conducted from October 2012 to November 2014 during which we did participant-observation, in-depth interviews with approximately 90 students attending English-medium programs as well as a comprehensive survey of 379 students. The university was selected, because it has invested heavily on internationalisation, which among other things involve offering numerous English-medium MA-programs.

3. Analysing students' mobility motives

Much research on students' motives for going abroad have been guided by rational choice theories, which assume students' choice of study destination is based on rational assessments of university ranking, quality of programs, and considerations of future employability (for critical discussions of rational choice approaches, see Waters, Brooks, and Pimlott-Wilson 2011). In recent years, however, scholars have begun exploring decisions to study abroad as a more complex phenomenon. In their study of student mobility to Copenhagen, Mosneaga and Winther (2013: 183) argue that choice of study destination appears to be the outcome of a combination of different inputs, desires and opportunities. Similarly, in their study of mobile British students, Waters, Brooks, and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) conceptualise student mobility within the broader framework of transnational academic spaces, and argue that mobility decisions are shaped by a combination of different

parameters such as prior mobility experience, embedding in transnational networks and socio-economic status.

In this article, we use Bourdieu's conceptualisation of strategy to capture the complexity of mobility decisions. Rather than conceptualizing strategy as an outcome of rational calculations, Bourdieu suggests that strategies represent ways of navigating in spaces of "possibles" (Lamaison & Bourdieu 1986). According to Bourdieu social spaces are always sign-posted spaces (Bourdieu 2000: 225). "Possibles" refer to the signs that individuals of different backgrounds and with different experiences perceive as the routes available to them. All possibilities are thus not available for everybody. "Navigation" in social space is in the Bourdieusian framework linked to habitus (internalised dispositions acquired through habituation) and capitals (relevant resources) with reference to position in social space. Position provides the point of view, habitus makes sense of what is seen and capitals determine what is possible. Thus in order to explore the strategies of mobile students we need to construct their points of view with reference to their positions in social spaces, their relevant resources, their trajectories as well as of the structural constraints for their choices.

4. Constructing points of view

Studies of student mobility often focus on students of a particular nationality, i.e. Nepalese students (Valentin 2012) or German students (Carlson 2011). Logically, nationality understood as political citizenship structures, the legal and economic relationship between countries, and therefore, also the possibilities for mobility; nationality understood as cultural citizenship contributes to the structuring of students' worldview and is therefore also likely to structure their preferences for particular study destinations. However, methodological nationalism tends to downplay differences within national groups, and overlook similarities across different nationalities. In this article, we take a different approach. Constructing the university as a meeting place for students from a variety of places and backgrounds, we attempt to map out the different routes that lead to this particular Danish university.

We start by analysing our survey data in order to find systematic similarities and differences that may be used to construct groups of students with common characteristics. We use these groups to structure our analysis of the interviews. We thus explore how students with particular characteristics talk about going abroad to study and choosing a Danish university. The groups we deal with are groups "on paper" (Bourdieu 1985: 725ff) which stand out in the survey data and not groups with group identities.

When mapping out similarities and differences between different student groups, we apply a prosopography-inspired approach. Prosopography is a method used by historians (e.g. Le Roy Ladurie 1980) and sociologists (e.g. Bourdieu 1988). It consists of a systematic collection of comparable biographical information as well as trajectories about people who belong to the same field or in other ways have much in common (Broady & Ullman 2001) – in our case international students enrolled at a Danish university. The biographical information is used to identify the commonalities and differences that characterise the people in question, and which may be used to explain their choices and actions. Following recent scholarship on student mobility (see above), we have used the following data from our survey to construct groups: parents' education and jobs, parents' mobility history, personal mobility history, and network in Denmark.

We have supplemented the survey data with 70 qualitative interviews in order to understand how different students make sense of their choices. In the analysis of the interviews we have identified passages where students talk about their reasons for going abroad and choosing Denmark, their knowledge about Denmark, their understanding of university rankings as well as details about their life stories, their travel experiences, their network in Denmark and plans for the future. These passages are used to understand how the world and Denmark look from different perspectives.

In the table below we outline five different positions constructed from the survey data from which students talk very differently about going abroad and choosing Denmark, and who express very different expectations to a degree from a Danish university.

Characteristics	Parents educated; Student support; Inherited mobility capital (some); Acquired mobility capital (some); Relationship to Denmark important; Social network in Denmark: family, co-national communities; church, student organisations; Plan to return;	Parents well educated; Economic capital; Inherited mobility capital; Acquired mobility capital; Relationship to Denmark not important; Plan to move on;	Parents well educated; Inherited mobility capital; Acquired mobility capital; Economic capital; Often scholarship; Denmark negative factor; No network in Denmark; Consider staying;	Parents low or no education; Few economic resources; No or limited inherited mobility capital; No or limited acquired mobility capital (Erasmus, work-abroad); No or limited network in Denmark; Could stay but often plan to return;	Parents not educated; Often scholarship; No or limited inherited mobility capital (cousins, friends); No or limited acquired mobility capital (work abroad); No or limited network in Denmark; Plan to return;
Nationalities	Sweden, Norway, Faroe Isles, Iceland, Germany	Austria, Brazil, Canada, Dutch, Germany, Italy, India, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Sweden, USA	China, Indonesia, Singapore	Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, UK, (Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, Moldova)	Cameroon, China, Ghana, India, Kenya, Nepal, South Africa, Uganda
Strategy	Playing it safe	Being cosmopolitan	Securing second chance	Looking for a better life	Graduating from Europe

Table 2: Construction of groups according to social background, mobility histories, plans and strategy

As can be seen, each position is comprised of students of several different nationalities. Some nationalities may be found in more than one position. The positions reflect the

students' regional and/or socio-cultural backgrounds, reflecting on the one hand different mobility patterns from the Nordic countries, the Western world, Eastern and Southern EU as well as the third world and on the other different mobility patterns by students of different social classes. The groups are not sharply separated from each other; they rather reflect a continuum of differences. They correspond to five strategies which we will present in the following sections.

5. Playing it safe

When comparing the students' backgrounds, the way they talk about their motives for going abroad, and their lives in Denmark, the majority of students from neighboring countries such as Norway, Iceland, Sweden, (Northern) Germany² and the Faroe Islands³ stand out in a number of ways.

These students come from fairly similar socio-economic backgrounds; their parents are educated and typically hold blue or white collar jobs. They speak four languages on average, usually their mother tongue, English, one of the Nordic languages and one of the (Western) world languages e.g. French or Spanish. Most of them receive economic support either from their own or from the Danish government.

These students have what might be called a *thick* relationship to Denmark. Their parents or grandparents have typically lived in Denmark. Many have spent childhood vacations there, some have relatives in Denmark, they know of others who study or have studied in Denmark, most of them understand Danish at least partially, and they have ties to their co-national communities in Denmark.

The thick relationship may be explained with reference to the historical relationships between the neighbours in the North which is manifested both as bonds between states and bonds between people (Olsen 2010: 110). It is a kind of transnational social capital (Faist 2000), not simply manifested as social ties but also as an internalised feel for the country, due to the

²The German students included here are mostly associated with the Danish minority in Northern Germany. A few 'native' Germans are included as well

³The Faroe Islands are legally a part of Denmark and for all technical and economic purposes Faroese students are Danish. However in academic literature as well as in government statistics Faroese students are counted as international students (e.g. Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2010). As they have to move 1400 km in order to attend a Danish university their strategies are presumably different than if they had lived in central Denmark.

official as well as family-based interconnectedness of the Nordic countries and the Danish-German border region.

When explaining why they chose to study in Denmark, these students often mention the convenience of Denmark as a study destination. Several students explain how the cooperation between administrations in the Nordic countries makes it almost as easy to enrol in a Danish university as in a university at home, as can be seen from the following quote⁴:

“Instead of going to Australia and other sort of more foreign countries, it’s just because it’s simple, (...) it’s all streamlined for having students going between the Nordic countries (...). If you want to go somewhere else, but you don’t want the hassle of going to United States or Australia it is easy to go to Denmark”.

The moderate foreignness of Denmark is also reflected in the considerations these students have regarding the value of the degree they will receive. Degrees from Danish universities are well-known in the neighbouring countries and will likely be recognised by future employers at home.

For students from the neighboring countries, the added value of studying in Denmark is more attributed to having lived abroad and gained international experience. This does not mean that the quality of the degree is unimportant. In fact, these students chose a Danish degree because it is of similar quality to what they can get at home. In many of the interviews, distrust towards (more) foreign education systems is expressed, as can be seen from the following quote:

“I looked at several educations, also (...) in the UK. But I don’t think that the education in UK... in my perception at least, it is not as high standards as [education] in Denmark. So pretty quickly I chose Denmark”.

The thickness of the relationship these students have to Denmark is particularly visible in their everyday life. As mentioned above, they know Denmark, and they are embedded in different kinds of transnational ties. Some of these ties reflect personal networks. Others reflect more established communities as described by this student:

“Most of my friends are [from home] (...). We have a community, and we meet for events at bars, but we also have a Church and a Sunday school, and (...) then we play indoor football once a week”.

These communities of co-nationals usually receive funding from home governments or from companies and organisations. They own or rent buildings; they organise import of food from home and provide special deals on insurances and plane tickets. They also provide religious services and holiday celebrations based on traditions from the home country. Their

⁴ In order to secure anonymity for students we do not specify their nationality when we quote; rather we present quotes as voices of particular positions, here that of a particular group of students from neighbouring countries.

community-effect goes further than simply providing a safety-net and a social network abroad. They may also kick-start careers at home. Many of the students we have talked to expect to return home after graduation. In the interviews they mention that back home they are likely to meet others whom they know from Denmark or who have a degree from a Danish university. Such transnational ties are believed to enhance employment prospects.

In sum, for these students, Denmark appears to be a safe, trusted and familiar destination. They are abroad, but not too far away, they are living in another country, but with co-nationals and friends within reach. They can study for free, they are financially secure and they can expect that their degrees will be recognised when they go home. Studying abroad thus appears to be a safe and low-risk investment.

6. Cosmopolitans

While the mobility of the Nordic students discussed above is facilitated by transnational social capital and thick relations to Denmark, other students are better described with reference to a concept of “cosmopolitan capital” (Munk et al. 2012: 34). Cosmopolitan capital represents an attempt to rethink Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital in the context of transnational student mobility. Munk defines cosmopolitan capital as an inclination to participate in global social arenas due to mental and bodily dispositions acquired when growing up in families where travelling, interest in foreign politics and culture is prevalent (Munk et al. 2012)⁵. The students in our sample who may be labelled “cosmopolitans” are of different nationalities, primarily but not exclusively from the Western world, and have a number of characteristics in common. Their parents are well-educated and/or hold high-status jobs, many lived abroad when young, quite a few are children of mixed marriages where at least one parent has migrated; they speak between five and seven languages – often a mix of world languages and very local languages they have learned while living abroad. Among these students, language combinations such as English, German, Spanish, Hindi and Setswana or Italian, English, Swahili, Danish and Kalaallisut are not uncommon. These students are what Waters (2007: 478) calls ‘habitually transnational’: they are used to move in and be part of transnational social spaces. Furthermore, they are economically secure; either their parents can afford to pay their tuition fees and living expenses, or they have scholarships.

⁵ Murphy-Lejeune (2002) and Brooks and Waters (2012) operate with a similar concept which they call ‘mobility capital’. We use mobility capital for experience with travelling; see later.

For these students, going abroad to study is not just about getting a degree but also and maybe more, about experiencing other cultures and seeing the world. Like the privileged students Waters, Brooks, and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) discuss in their article on mobile British students, these students manifest what Bourdieu calls “a playful seriousness about life” which is facilitated by “distance from economic necessity” (Bourdieu 1984: 54). When talking about their expectations to the programs they have enrolled in, these students tend to focus more on international than academic aspects of the programs, as may be seen from the following quote from an interview with a Western European student:

“I was really, really looking forward to meeting a lot of people from all around the world and learning from their ... like who they are and where they are from and the cultures. Everything I just would learn, you know and yeah to get to know people that was one of the biggest expectations I had. Academically I don't know. (...) I guess that whatever they teach me is good”.

“Playful seriousness” is also reflected in the way these students have gathered information about study destinations, programs and life abroad. This may be seen from the following quote from an interview with a North American student. When asked whether she had looked into university ranking before choosing the university, she answered:

“Ah, where it ranks in ...? No, I didn't. I didn't really have any prior research when coming here. Kinda went out on a limb 'cause I looked into the program first, more than the university and so I got in and I thought 'okay, well, I should research the city'. I found out it was (...) a big student city so I thought it must have a good reputation, but I hadn't looked at rankings at all (...) I felt like this was my... If I got in, it was meant to be”.

This way of selecting a degree program abroad may be explained by the fact that for many of these students going abroad is part of an already mobile lifestyle, which is also reflected in descriptions of everyday student life, where travelling is an important part. In the interviews they talk about weekend trips to Barcelona and Prague, and holidays in Reykjavik and Istanbul. The way they talk about travelling is reflected in the following quote from an interview with a Western European student:

“This year alone I have been in, okay, we went skiing in Italy and I have been to London and Amsterdam. I am actually going to Amsterdam again next week, (...). And, oh I was also in Frankfurt recently to visit a friend. And I am going to Italy with a couple of people from my class”.

In this respect mobility is not so much about going to a specific study destination. Rather going to a study destination is part of a lifestyle that involves travelling. This also becomes clear when the students discuss the usefulness of the degree they will receive. Surprisingly many state that they do not really need the degree, as evidenced in this quote:

“I've always loved travelling and I mean I know you don't need a Master's degree (...) but it was kinda like an excuse to my parents to let me travel around Europe for two years”.

None of these students have chosen their Master's program because it is in Denmark. Rather they have been surfing the internet for interesting programmes and/or scholarship options. Denmark presents itself as a possible study destination because the degree programs are taught in English and presented as international.

In sum, contrary to the students discussed above, these students are studying abroad as part of a mobile and cosmopolitan lifestyle. They are interested in experiencing other cultures and building international networks. For them there is very little risk involved in the selection of a degree program in a lesser known study destination, as the degree is part of a bigger experience.

7. Second chances

Not all “cosmopolitan” students fit into the playful mobility strategy outlined above. In our sample we find a number of students who are very similar to the ones discussed above in the sense that they too have parents who are well-educated and/or have high-status jobs; they have also travelled while growing up and have relatives in different countries. But in contrast to the students discussed above, these students, who are primarily from Asia, indicate that while going to Europe is exciting and interesting it is not their first priority. Most of them have applied for enrolment in highly ranked universities in USA without success. Denmark becomes a possible study destination because of the English-language degree programs, but also because of the availability of scholarships. As one explained:

“It's not that difficult to come [to Denmark]. Sorry. Because some universities they just need you to [have passed] (...) that's why there are so many [Asian] students studying here, (...) it's quite easy to get a scholarship here compared with the UK or USA or Canada. For those universities you have to be really really like top top to get a scholarship (...) but here it's [easy]”.

Like the other cosmopolitan students, these students enjoy a very mobile lifestyle while studying in Denmark and enjoy the international study environment. However, they talk more about the lack of prestige of a Danish university degree in their home countries than their Western colleagues. This is clearly expressed in the following quote:

“Actually (...) there are so many students [who] go abroad for study. Some of them go to the US and some of them go to Britain and some go to some other European countries and even Singapore and some African countries. And when (...) your parents' friends asked ‘ooh you'll go abroad and which country are you going?’ and if you say ‘I'm going to America or to Britain’ they'll go ‘oh, that's really good’. But if you told them you are going to some countries in Africa or just like Denmark they will say, ‘Why are you going there? (...) It is not even a big country like ours’”.

For these students, a degree from a Danish university may be considered to be a “roundabout route” to go back home (Waters 2007: 486). In her study of mobile students from Hong Kong, Waters (2007: 485) explains that throughout East and South East Asia the competition to get into top universities is extremely fierce, and that lack of successful enrolment leaves upper middle class students with the option to either enter the labour market, and thereby risk their family’s status, or attend a “sanctuary school” (Bourdieu 1996: 216ff) in an alternative educational market. A “sanctuary school”, which in an international context could be a university in an untraditional destination, provides “a second chance” (Bourdieu 1996, Waters 2007) as also indicated in the following quote:

“I don't know exactly [what I will do with the degree]. For me I think the optimistic result will be I have another chance. I can change my orientation because I learned something, (...). I can know what exactly I want to pursue. Not just a career but maybe an academic object, (...), so I want to pursue a PhD degree maybe”.

A Danish degree may thus lead back on the academic track at home, or it may lead to a job in Denmark which can be used as a stepping stone for a career at home, as another student explained:

“I think staying in Denmark is quite good. It's quite far away from home [but] some [people] think that if you have the experience [of] working abroad, it will be beneficial for your career-path [at home] in a later time”.

Despite biographical similarities between these students and those presented in the previous section, a different strategy can be detected; rather than simply being mobile and experiencing other cultures, these students appear to be taking a detour while looking for a suitable way back. There is thus more at stake for them, and they may risk not being able to return for a very long time.

8. Looking for a better life

According to Van Mol (2013), internationally mobile students mostly belong to privileged social strata. This is also the case for the students we have considered so far. In our sample, however, we do also find students who come from less privileged backgrounds. Some are first generation students; others are from families who have experienced downward social mobility. Geographically they come from EU member-states, from the immediate EU neighbourhood (e.g. the Balkans and Moldova) and from developing countries in Africa and Asia. In this section we focus on EU-students, as they have specific rights in Denmark; they can study for free, and if they also work they may be eligible for Danish student support. Non-

EU/EEA-students pay tuition fees, unless they are granted a scholarship, and they need visa and residence permits. They therefore navigate differently.

The students whose strategies we explore in this section mostly come from Eastern and Southern EU member-states. What distinguishes them is that their parents have little or no education. They have fewer economic resources and have travelled less than the parents of the students discussed in the previous sections. In the interviews some of them do talk about travelling in ways that are quite similar to those of the cosmopolitan students. They too talk about a “passion for travelling” and a “desire to experience the world”. However, this desire does not result from a disposition for travelling developed in childhood. Rather inspiration comes from teachers, friends and media. The ones who have travelled before going abroad for their MA have followed more organised routes than the cosmopolitans discussed above. They have participated in student exchange programs, attended international summer schools or worked abroad during vacations.

They mostly belong to the increasing number of young people from Eastern and Southern Europe who go abroad to escape what they perceive as futures with no hope at home. Most of their colleagues go to the UK, Germany and France (Lastun and Banciu 2014). For the students we discuss here Denmark becomes a possible study destination because education is free, but also because it sounds like a place where they want to be, as explained by this Southern European student:

"My budget is really tight so I could not go to England, you know, it is really expensive to study there. [But] as a European student I don't have to pay tuition fee in Scandinavia (...). And I was really attracted to the Scandinavian countries (...). I don't know, you hear so many good things about Scandinavian countries in general, like equality between women and men, it's better than in many other countries. And like ecology, you care more for ecology. (...) I heard that the education system is really good in Scandinavia as well, so yeah I think that's enough. So I applied".

The combination of international degree programs in English, highly ranked and fee-free universities, welfare and a country populated by "the happiest people in the world" (mentioned in many of our interviews), makes Denmark appear as an attractive study destination for these students (see also Wilken & Ginnerskov Hansen 2016). Many of them explain that it is the prospect of becoming part of a society with a government that cares about its citizens and particularly about its young people that makes Denmark desirable, as one of them stated:

"So I think it's everyone's dream, especially people from poor countries from East like Russia, Rumania, Bulgaria. And it's everyone's dream to study in an international university like this one, and I think it's everyone's dream to have a little better life".

Many of these students have learned about Denmark from acquaintances who themselves are students in Denmark. Their mobility is thus embedded in transnational ties. These ties

are *thinner* than the ones neighbouring students have; still, they function as a kind of social capital too. Having a network may mean having a place to crash when they first arrive, and it may mean help finding their way around the Danish system. Still, the *feel* for the country that these students have is qualitatively different from the one neighbouring students have. Neighbouring students navigate according to an embodied understanding of how things work in Denmark. These EU-students have a more general and superficial knowledge.

When talking about the obstacles they face in their everyday life, it becomes clear that the knowledge they had on Denmark before coming is often lacking. Many seem to take for granted that fee-free education is equivalent to a low-cost life in general. Very few are aware of the high living expenses in Denmark, nor have they fully realised that, because society outside of the university functions in Danish, it is difficult to find meaningful and well-paid student jobs (see also Valentin 2012). Students often have to take low-skilled employment or even work illegally in order to survive. This is clear from the following quote where a student talks about her first year in Denmark:

"[At first] I had two jobs (...), one was a cleaning job at a hotel, and in that hotel there were only international students and international people (...) because (...) no Dane would ever take such a job (...). So only the boss was Danish. All the workers were international (...). I was also bartender in a club, and there were also Danes working there. But the Danes got paid the normal way to their bank account, but us internationals we just got money illegally after each shift".

For many of these students' life in Denmark is thus very different from what they imagined when planning the trip and quite a few live economically unstable lives where they constantly worry about money for rent and food. These problems are often enhanced when they compare their own situation with that of Danish students who are entitled to state stipends and low interest loans. As one of them stressed:

"I think it's mostly the fact that you know that they [Danish students] are financially secure, they never have to struggle. Whenever they run out of money they can borrow some from the government, they can get a loan. And you yourself cannot. This might create a problem inside your mind (...) and you cannot socialize with them because you envy them".

Even when they manage to get the SU, they sense a difference. Danish students get stipends in order to work as little as possible and instead concentrate on their studies; EU-students get stipends as part as their rights as mobile workers, which means that they have to work in order to uphold the stipend.

In sum, these students mostly go abroad to create a better life for themselves and eventually for their families. Before coming to Denmark many of them assume that student life will be uncomplicated and without money worries. Judging from our data this is rarely the case. Quite a few of the EU-students we have interviewed ended up returning home before

they finished their degree. Some manage to finish it as long-distance students while others give up.

9. Graduating from Europe

Since the introduction of tuition fees at Danish universities in 2006, a number of scholarships have been earmarked for students from developing countries. Some are provided by the Danish state, others by the EU and various international NGOs. In our sample we have a number of scholarship students from Africa and Asia. Besides getting scholarships they have other things in common: they come from disadvantaged backgrounds, they grew up in remote areas, they are mostly male, and they are first generation students. As an African student explained:

“Well I come from a very disadvantaged family. (...). Nobody works in the family apart from my mother who is selling stuff just to put food on the table. I have worked (...) in a domestic capacity where I was not getting much. Then I thought about going back to school and study and have a degree, maybe I will have a better job, [and] I will be able to provide for the family better. I am the first one [in my family] to have a degree. I graduated last year and applied for this scholarship. [In order to get it] you have to come from a disadvantaged background, which means poor families and stuff. And you also have to have good grades”.

International student mobility both from Africa and Asia has traditionally involved students from elite families going to well-known universities in former colonial “mother countries”, and increasingly also in USA (Efionayi and Piguet 2014). In fact, the elites of these countries are often educated in Europe. However, over the past decade, many developing countries have seen demographic changes in their student populations due to the rising school enrolment rates in the 1980s and 1990s (Khefaoui 2009). An increasing number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds pursue further education abroad, either because they cannot find employment or because they are unable to progress beyond bachelor level due to the limited educational opportunities in their home countries (Gribble 2008: 29). Some manage to get scholarships to universities in the global North, for instance in Denmark.

The parents of these students have little or no education. Often it is distant family members who have supported them, morally and economically, to pursue education. They have little support from their parents who are often scared of what may happen to their offspring while abroad. This is reflected in the following quote from an interview with an Asian student:

“First (...) when I was telling [my parents about the possibility] to go abroad and to do studies and all, they were scared, and they were afraid that what may happen, because they have not studied and they don't have ideas. So they were refusing me, and then they were hesitating. And they were

stopping me too, they would say not to apply for this, but I just tried to make them understand, and finally they agreed”.

For these students, getting a scholarship not only allows them to invest in future possibilities; it also gives them the immediate opportunity to support their families, as expressed by this African student:

“Well I did not get much response [from my family] when I told them [about the scholarship]; I did not see as to whether they were happy or scared or angry. Well I will just say that maybe they are supportive of the idea that I'm coming to Europe to study (...) and they don't have to pay anything; they don't have to do anything actually. And the idea that to a certain extent I will be able to send some money to them that's an advantage I think.”

Many of the scholarship students we have talked to from developing countries say they send home part of their scholarship as remittances. This leaves them with limited funds to cover rent and living expenses in Denmark. Some become isolated from the student environment because they cannot afford the costs of a social life. Quite a few try to find jobs. If they succeed, it is often low-skilled or illegal jobs.

Contrary to the other students in our sample, these students have very little “mobility capital”, understood as the practical experience of travelling. They have not been abroad before; they have never applied for passports or visa; and they have never arranged trips half-way around the world. Nor have their parents. A few of them have cousins or uncles who went abroad. But travelling is not habitual to them. In the interviews with these students we hear about money-transfers that go wrong; about problems with the paperwork for visa applications; and about fees they did not know they had to pay. Some of this is evident in the following quote from an interview with an Asian student:

“I was supposed to come in (...) August (...). But due to my visa issues I came much later. (...) The problem was I didn't even know the process of visa, I just applied and then I just depended on [an agent]. (...) My visa got delayed [because] the agent was trying to get some money; he was trying to take some bribe from me. And that was the reason that it was late. (...) I didn't know that due to bribe he is delaying, and when I realized that he needs bribe, I just give it, because I had to... I didn't even have any other option, so I just did it”.

Many of the students we include in this category encounter visa problems and delays. They often miss study start, and the information students are given at the beginning of term. When they eventually arrive they are thus at a disadvantage.

Most of the students in this group have never heard about Denmark before they are presented with the opportunity to apply for a scholarship. As a Nepalese student explained:

“Maybe I had heard about Denmark. (...) We mainly know about UK, [as] many people go there because of some sort of world relation in UK, so that's why we know that and very little about Northern Europe”.

From the interviews and questionnaires, it appears that Denmark becomes a possible study destination for these students in one of two ways. Some students have been recruited through academic networks between their home universities and the Danish university. Their professors have been asked to recommend suitable candidates for particular Master's programs in Denmark. These students are thus moving within social networks built through international research cooperation. Others have received scholarships through organisations that fund Master's programs in Denmark. They have been looking for scholarships rather than destinations, and their academic profiles happen to match a particular priority area. Denmark is attractive because it is in Europe, and they hope a degree from Europe will help them get access to better jobs when they return.

Conclusion

Over the past decade there has been a growth in the number of students going abroad to study. At the same time, more countries have entered the competition to attract mobile students. So far research has mostly focused on mobility to large and popular destinations. It is however equally important to understand mobility to the smaller "off-beat" destinations in order to get a deeper understanding of how mobile students navigate in an increasingly global space of study destinations. In this article we have looked at student mobility to Denmark. With reference to data collected at a Danish university we have explored how international students come to choose Denmark as their study destination.

In order to structure our analysis, we used a prosopographical approach to identify similarities and differences between the students in terms of socio-economic background, previous mobility history, etc. Based on this we constructed five groups of students who have very different preconditions for selecting Denmark as study destination and very different student lives while in Denmark.

The first group consists of students from Denmark's neighbouring countries who select Denmark because it is familiar and easily accessible and because degrees from Danish universities are well-known and recognized in their home countries. For these students, going to Denmark involves practically no risk. On the contrary, studying in Denmark may give them an advantage in comparison to students staying at home, because they have demonstrated that they can manage life abroad.

The second group consists of students characterized by cosmopolitan capital. These students are highly mobile and “habitually transnational”. Studying abroad appears to fit into their mobile lifestyle. They have been looking for interesting degree programs and/or scholarships and in that way found Denmark. In the interviews these students appear to be less concerned with the value of a degree from a Danish university than other students in our sample, and more interested in gaining international experience.

In the analysis of our interviews we identified a sub-group of students with cosmopolitan capital for whom there appears to be a more at stake. For students from China and South East Asia with similar cosmopolitan backgrounds, a Danish university appears to be a second choice to more desirable universities at home and in USA. Most of these students hope a Danish degree will give them better chances at home, or that it will give them access to jobs in international companies that operate in their home countries.

A fourth group consists of EU-students, particularly from East and South, for whom Denmark is one of the few possible study destinations abroad. These students are less privileged than the students discussed above. They are in Denmark because they are unable to afford more prestigious universities in the UK or USA, but also because they are attracted to the Danish welfare system. They hope that student life in Denmark will make it possible for them to get a degree from a highly-ranked university abroad and that this will help them secure a better future. Often they discover that for them student life is anything but easy.

Finally, we constructed a group consisting of scholarship students from disadvantaged backgrounds in developing countries, who have received scholarships to study in Denmark. These students have very little prior knowledge about Denmark, but have great interest in getting a degree from a European university, which they hope will help them access good jobs at home. In comparison to the other students in our sample, these students have very little mobility capital and encounter numerous practical issues with visas, money transfers and travel arrangements. This makes them the most disadvantaged group of students in our sample, as lack of mobility capital is costly, both economically and in terms of delays. Many of these students feel socially isolated during their stay in Denmark. Their isolation is strengthened by the fact that many send home part of their scholarship money, and therefore have less money at their disposal.

For the five groups of students we have constructed, Denmark is a possible study destination in very different ways, and for very different reasons. Understanding such differences may help create a better understanding of the different opportunities and obstacles that students face.

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